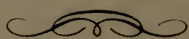


Living Masters of Music

SIR EDWARD ELGAR



R.J. BUCKLEY



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LIVING MASTERS OF MUSIC—II.
EDITED BY ROSA NEWMARCH

SIR EDWARD ELGAR





EDWARD ELGAR IN 1900

(From a photograph by Russell & Sons)

SIR EDWARD ELGAR

BY ROBERT J. BUCKLEY

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SIR EDWARD ELGAR

“Self-taught I sing. ’Tis heaven and heaven alone,
Inspires my song with music all its own.”

ODYSSEY.

“The heights by great men reached and kept,
Were not attained by sudden flight,
But they, while their companions slept,
Were toiling upward in the night.”

The Reliability of the Data Presented Pertaining to Elgar

INTRODUCTION

DURING a conversation with Dr. Frederick Temple, Archbishop of Canterbury, allusion was made to certain anecdotes concerning him. In his brusque, explosive way he ejaculated :

“ All lies ! ”

The same might be said of many anecdotes of Edward Elgar, and here is the point I wish to make.

Whatever this book states as fact may be accepted as such.

The sayings of Elgar are recorded in the actual words addressed directly to the writer, and upon these I rely to give to the book an interest it would not otherwise possess.

As to the critical opinions submitted in these pages, I will only say that they rest on a close study of Elgar's works, extending over nine or ten years. *Quot homines, tot sententiæ.*

I have not given any space to consideration

of Elgar's wanderings from the paths of contrapuntal rectitude, as laid down by the theory formalists. The Roman soldiers tied weights to their sandals when marching for exercise, that by discarding them in time of war they might rejoice in comparative lightness and freedom. So, it would seem, are musicians weighted in the study of strict counterpoint, that in free composition they may derive additional inspiration from the joy of casting the load aside. It may be suggested that Elgar has cast away not only the weights but also the sandals. The sequence of consecutive fifths in "The Apostles" is calculated to make the old theorists uneasy in their graves. But this is only history repeating itself. The Man of Progress is necessarily the Breaker of Laws, and if the Law-breaker is justified by results, we can demand no more. The rules of art are for the Novice, not for the Master, who, however, cannot be a Master without a novitiate under strict rule.)

In der Beschränkung zeigt sich erst der Meister,
Und das Gesetz nur kann ihm Freiheit geben.

My thanks are due to Sir Edward Elgar for

the copy of his early form-study ; and to Mr. Hubert A. Leicester, of Worcester, for the quintet portrait and other illustrations.

It is perhaps needful to add that the body of the book was not only written but also printed before the well-earned honour of knighthood was conferred on its subject.

ROBERT J. BUCKLEY.

MOSELEY, WORCESTERSHIRE,
July 14, 1904.

Ich habe nicht
vergessen
Ihrer von Mon-
day, 7. 11. 1891!

Al: Elger

(Birthplace)
EARLY YEARS of Edward
William
Elgar
His
Parents

EDWARD WILLIAM ELGAR was born at Broadheath, near Worcester, June 2, 1857. His surname, of Scandinavian origin, is a modernised form of Aelfgar, or "fairy spear." He is the eldest surviving son of W. H. Elgar, a native of Dover, and Ann Greening, of a yeoman stock hailing from Weston, in Herefordshire, and he is therefore apparently as English as can be. The elder Elgar left Dover to become an assistant in the music publishing house of Messrs. Coventry and Hollier, then in Dean Street, Soho, London, where, amongst other musical experiences, he used to hear Dragonetti play the pedal part of Bach's organ fugues on the double-bass, Barnett, who brought out an arrangement for piano and bass, taking the piano. Domenico Dragonetti, prince of contra-bassists, died in 1846. Five years before

this date, W. H. Elgar settled in Worcester, became organist of the Roman Catholic Church of Saint George, a position he was destined to hold for thirty-seven years, and in partnership with his brother established a music warehouse and made his influence felt in the musical doings of the city. It was at his suggestion that the masses of Cherubini in D minor and Hummel in E flat were first heard at the Three Choir meetings, and whenever the Festival took place at Worcester he played amongst the violins. A busy, striving man, this elder Elgar, doing all that in him lay to secure a fitting allowance of the bread that perisheth, not without endeavour after the artistic side of life. An accomplished musician, the father of the future composer discerned in the youthful Edward certain premonitions of unusual talent. The boy was considered clever ; but means were narrow, and the parents were not of those who sacrifice the rest of the family for the sake of one, however promising. Thus it was that Edward Elgar enjoyed no exceptional opportunities, no unusual privileges. At an early age he was sent to a ladies' school, where he took elementary pianoforte lessons, between

which slight instruction and the hints on violin technique he received from a Mr. Frederick Spray there was a great gulf fixed. No teacher took him over systematic courses of scales and studies ; no learned mentor supervised his exercises in harmony, counterpoint, canon and fugue. He heard no lectures on musical form, received no practical hints on orchestration. From the five-finger exercises of the ladies' school to the lessons of Mr. Spray stretched a desert arid of regular musical instruction. The most impressionable years of life were passed without the stamp of any teacher's personality. The boy was left to grow as he chose—musically ; to take any and every artistic impression that might be floating in the air ; to form himself on any model that might capture his young fancy, or to remain formless, at his own good will and pleasure. About him was no vestige of the prodigy, or rather none that the undiscerning world could see. Wherein is no wonder. For while the multitude are quick to recognise and applaud the musical acrobat, it takes something like genius to detect the earliest signs of superior intellectual or creative force.

(Since the organist of the Church of Saint George had not leisure to give special attention to the musical education of his family, and since there seemed no sufficient reason why Edward should be singled out for instruction, the boy was in this respect largely left to his own devices. And here was visible the first development of the phenomenal tenacity, the indomitable perseverance, which characterise the Edward Elgar of a later day. Relying on himself he discovered for himself, invented his own methods, evolved his own strategy of learning, losing precious time in cutting his path through the solid rock, yet gaining immeasurably in force of character; toiling by circuitous paths when short cuts, unknown, lay on every hand; ever thinking strenuously, on the watch for smallest hints, developing the tiniest germ of knowledge into larger and still larger proportions; an idealist, dreaming; a toiler, working;—a compound of Keltic fire and fancy, derived from some remote unknown ancestor, and the cold, stern determination of the practical Anglo-Saxon; baffled here, victorious there; every achievement a new point of departure, every summit painfully gained

displaying a wider prospect ; the very obstacles in his path arousing a keener spirit of combat, a deeper resolution to emerge a conqueror. Not that he cherished the smallest ambition of fame. An inborn inextinguishable thirst for knowledge spurred him on. Instinctively he felt that the highest order of pleasure was the discovery of truth, listening to the teaching of truth, and the adoption of its teaching. A pile of old books in the loft of a stable were to him as pearls of great price. His mother was a reader of good books. The greatest poets were known to her, and through her to the family. This middle-class woman of compulsory economies, and with seven children to look after, had affinity with the best English literature ; moreover, she read translations of the Latin classics, of the Greek tragedians, and talked in the home of what she read. "The best woman that ever drew breath" is the description of one who knew her for a lifetime, and this testimony of a non-relative is confirmed on every hand. Blessed are they who have mothers like the mother of Edward Elgar ! The bent of the parent explains the bent of the son. His boyish choice of books

from the stable loft is no longer inexplicable. There were the "Arcadia" of Sir Philip Sydney, Baker's "Chronicles," Drayton's "Polyolbion," and other volumes regarded by the shy, retiring youth as treasures of unspeakable worth. Without his musical surroundings Edward Elgar might have been a poet, might have emulated Dante or Milton. He was born to high emprise. His turn of thought inclined to the serious, the heroic, the epic. For him there was fascination in all things beautiful. He had a love for every form of art. Certain mediæval carvings in Worcester Cathedral moved him strangely; the soul of the artist of centuries ago evoking corresponding vibrations in the artist-soul of the boy. Across the ages spirit spoke to spirit.

Though without formal instruction, the future revolutioniser of oratorio was not without certain demonstrable advantages. Music and musical instruments were available: their use was not forbidden; moreover, the boy could sit at the organ with his father, drinking in the music of Mozart and Haydn and the older composers who have written for the ser-

Elgar's Demonstrable Advantages.

vices of the Church of Rome. A born student, an omnivorous reader, he cared little for boyish sports. His mind was occupied with higher thoughts. Absorbed by his enthusiasms, other things seemed small. Cricket had no chance against counterpoint. Edward Elgar was possessed by an intense desire to make all knowledge his province, his early environments directing him to music as a speciality. Urged by enthusiasm, silent but unquenchable, he laboured incessantly in season and out of season, teaching himself the violin, the viola, the violoncello, the piano, the organ, the bassoon: in short, any and every instrument that came within reach. A constant stream of music passed through the warehouse. He studied it all, especially prizing that of the great masters. To him a Sonata of Beethoven was as clusters of grapes in the vineyards of Eshcol, and a Bach prelude and fugue more to be desired than much fine gold. His love of music was admitted, his industry admired. But love of art and its fervent pursuit are not always tokens of original talent, and the sleepy city of Worcester remained unconscious of the genius that in a few years was to make the

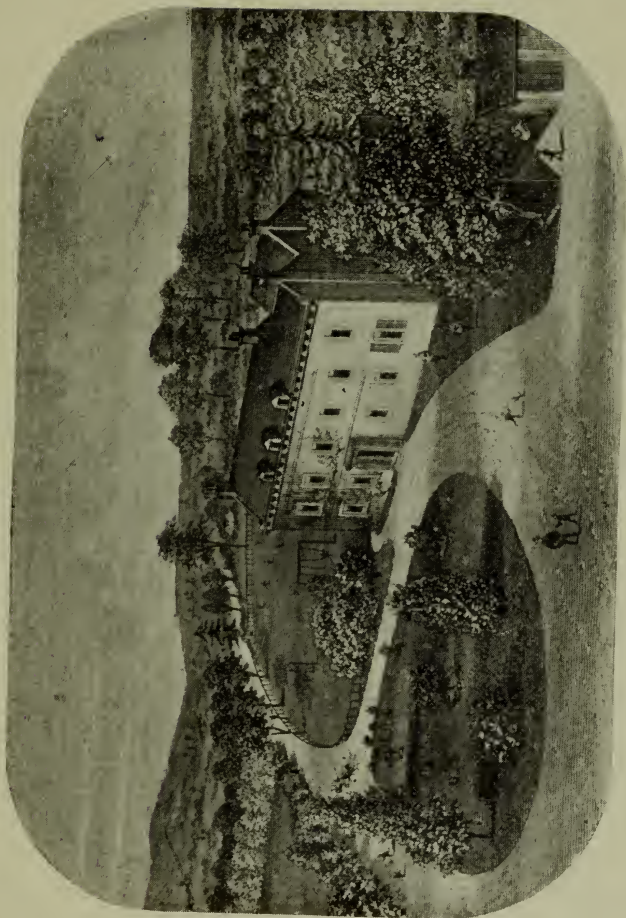
ancient town famous wherever good music was heard.

Meanwhile Edward Elgar attended school at Littleton House, where a Mr. Francis Reeve, who supervised the education of some twenty-five to thirty boys, appears to have made a lasting impression on the future composer, who told the writer that to those far-away days was due his oratorio "The Apostles." He said :

"The idea of the work originated in this way. Mr. Reeve addressing his pupils, once remarked : 'The Apostles were poor men, young men, at the time of their calling ; perhaps before the descent of the Holy Ghost not cleverer than some of you here.' This set me thinking, and the oratorio of 1903 is the result." A moment later he added, with characteristic luxury of humour too (deep for smiles, "I do not remember more than twenty-seven fellow pupils, but there must have been three or four hundred, as that number (or thereabouts) are kind enough to remind me of our early acquaintance at Littleton House.")

(In addition to the combined influences of the private school, the organ-loft, and the

The Musical Atmosphere of England in which young Edward Elgar began his interest in music and his study



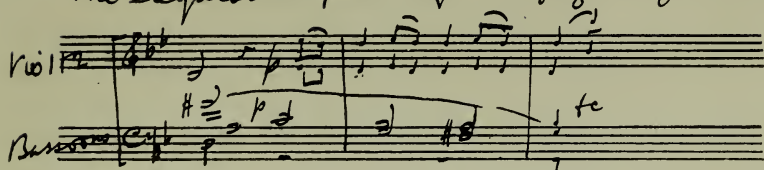
LITTLETON HOUSE, NEAR WORCESTER, WHERE EDWARD ELGAR WENT TO SCHOOL



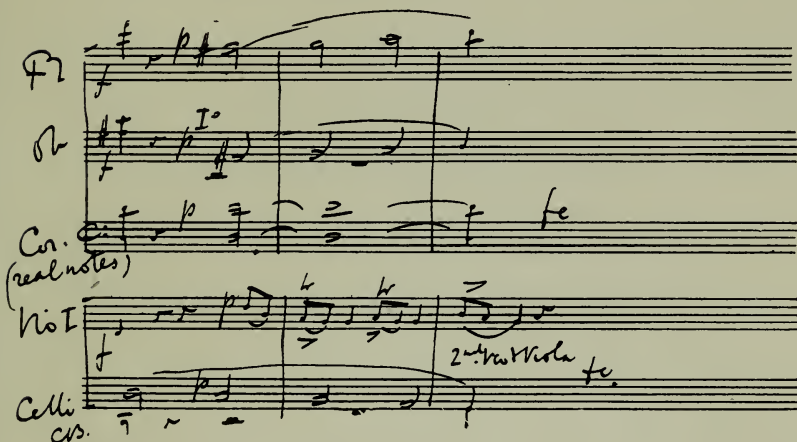
music warehouse, must surely be added those which emanated from the manifold romantic and historic associations of the city itself. There was the Guildhall with its statue of King Charles and its cannon left on the fateful field of Worcester, "The Faithful City." There was the cathedral with the mysterious crypt where good Bishop Wulstan worshipped in the days of the Conqueror, perhaps religiously resentful of the raid of Hardicanute, who set fire to its predecessor just twenty-five years before the Conquest. Then the church held royal memories, though not precisely of the sort that smell sweet and blossom in the dust. King John attended Mass under its roof in 1207, and sleeps his last sleep below the gilded effigy in the choir. It may be that the future writer of a Coronation Ode admired King John as somewhat of a champion in the matter of crownings. As a pious Roman Catholic, the youthful Elgar may have approved of his four coronations, and especially of that in which the harassed King accepted the crown from a legate of the Pope, and agreed to hold the kingdoms of England and Ireland as a papal tenant, paying a thousand marks a year.

The young dreamer was constantly in the cathedral, listening to the anthems and services of the old English masters, noting everything, making endless inquiries, prosecuting an interminable research. Very early his sensitive mind was attracted by the infrequent chromatic harmonies occurring in this kind of music. Did a chord strike him as more than usually effective or expressive, he would not rest until he had studied its environments, the disposition of the voices, and whatsoever else gave beauty above its sister chords. This leaning to chromatics, be it observed, was by the musical light and leading of the time accounted rank heresy, if not flat blasphemy. The critics were severe on all things not diatonic. Young composers were exhorted to rely, not on "portentous harmonies intended to be dramatically expressive," but on "the glorious resources of contrapuntal device." Music was to be constructed on scientific lines, and none was good unless sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought. Musicians were fettered by the theories of Fux and Albrechtsberger and Cherubini just as earlier the scientists had been fettered—in

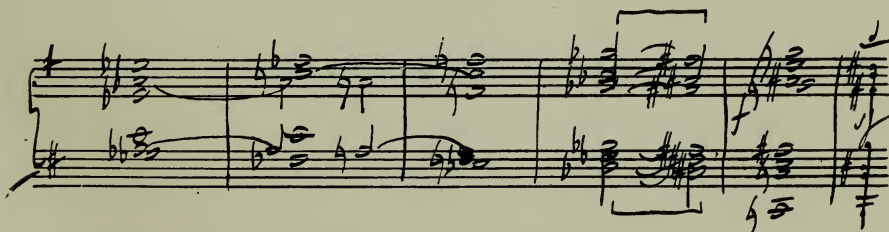
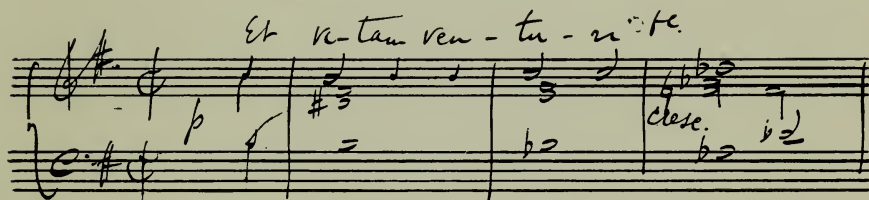
The exquisite passage in Mozart (bars 20/21)



is, in this respectful perversion,



EXAMPLE OF ELGAR'S METHOD OF STUDY. THE REMARKS IN THIS AND THE PRECEDING EXAMPLE, WITH THE MUSIC, ARE FAC-SIMILES OF ELGAR'S HAND IN 1904



EXAMPLE OF ELGAR'S BOYISH CHROMATICS. FROM A CREDO WRITTEN IN 1872-3

geology, by the hypothesis of catastrophes ; in chemistry, by the hypothesis of vital forces. That the composing of music was subject to iron rules was made clear by the examination papers of the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge, ancient repositories of golden knowledge, unique plenipotentiaries of the muse, and chartered conferrers of immortality. In those wonderful sheets the aspirant to musical honours, his eye in fine frenzy rolling, saw oratorio in the rough. There was the crude material from the like of which Bach and Handel had evolved their colossal choruses. Your course as a candidate was perfectly clear. You took your *canto fermo* and on it built several species, and several cunning mixtures of species, of strict counterpoint. You took your fugal theme, and having decided to treat it tonally or otherwise, a vital point, you wrote your exposition, your episodes, your stretto and your pedal, by no means forgetting your augmentation and your diminution, and particularly remembering that while consecutive fifths meant relegation to the darkest depths of Tartarus, no university professor could resist the magic of a

canon cancrizans, say in the Hypomixolydian mode.

Such in large measure was the orthodox musical atmosphere of England when Edward Elgar, still a child, was penetrated with the charm of certain sudden transitions in the masses of Mozart and the symphonies of Beethoven, the latter only available to him in pianoforte arrangements. (The story of every mind susceptible to artistic feeling affords instances of sudden impressions of far-reaching influence. One of the earliest and most powerful of these came upon Edward Elgar on his first reading of Beethoven's First Symphony. Only the pianoforte score, but the effect was there. It came upon him like a lightning flash. The transition to the key of D flat, and back to C, in the minuetto, left him breathless—"sank into his very soul"—convinced him that counterpoint was not the last word of musical art; that Tallis and Byrd and Orlando Gibbons and the rest of the classic church-composers had not exhausted the possibilities: that, despite the dicta of the critics and university professors, the "solid diatonic style" did not represent the Ultima Thule of

*How Elgar Was Affected From
His First Reading of
Beethoven's First Symphony and
Other Sources of Information
and Inspiration.*

composition; and, finally, that Mozart and Beethoven, having attained the highest plane of emotional expressiveness, were the best models for study. Already, unaided and alone, he pored over an old copy of Catel's "Treatise on Harmony," translated by Mary Cowden Clarke. Then he had Mozart's "Succinct Thorough Bass," translated by Sabilla Novello, "a dear old book" still cherished among his treasures. "Cherubini on Counterpoint" was eagerly devoured, and preludes and fugues innumerable flowed from his ever-busy pen. Already the creative instinct was strong within him, and he wrote incessantly. "The worst of the old textbooks," he says, "is that they teach building but not architecture." Later he owed advancement to Stainer's book on Harmony, which, at the time of its publication, the old school of organists regarded askance as radical, revolutionary, tending to "red ruin and the breaking up of laws," and still later found invaluable hints in Sir Hubert Parry's articles in Grove's "Dictionary of Music."

In the music-warehouse, in the organ-loft, in the lumber-room of the stable, the art-spirit of

Edward Elgar was developing. All men who have risen head and shoulders above their fellows have been dreamers in their youth. But while they dreamed their fill, they combined their capacity for seeing visions with an infinite capacity for work.

THE YOUTH AND MANHOOD

AT fifteen Edward Elgar left school, and at the instance of a legal friend of the family entered a solicitor's office with the object of becoming a lawyer, versed in the quilllets and quiddets of the English code, and possibly not altogether without an eye on the woolsack, a peerage, and a final termination in the odour of sanctity and the House of Lords. From June 1872 to June 1873 the budding composer held a steady Coke-and-Blackstone course, after which he quietly told his parents that all was not precisely as he could wish, and that he would prefer to make himself generally useful about the warehouse and the church. Once more he became saturated with an atmosphere of music. He sat with his father at the organ and extemporised introductory voluntaries. He would frequently accompany the services. He

*Elgar
and his
Studies
and
Musical
Activities*

Elgar's Practice on Various Instruments

was always at work. He plodded through the "Organ Schools" of Rink and Best without assistance; continued his study of theory; conceived a plan of study at Leipzig, and began to learn German; played much of the pianoforte music of Kotzeluch, Schobert and Emanuel Bach; wrote fugues and other forms of music, abandoning his original fancy for scoring his compositions on four lines instead of five (touching concession to the conventions of an artificial age); ^{per}kept up his practice on various instruments, with an especial leaning to the violin; played the bassoon in a wind-instrument quintet, consisting of two flutes, oboe, clarinet and bassoon, for which weird association he wrote endless music, of which he now speaks as "no good, on account of the unusual combination," and in due course was admitted as a violinist to the orchestra of the Worcester Festival Choral Society, conducted by Mr. Done, organist of the cathedral, and to other orchestras in the Worcester district, ultimately attaining local fame as a solo performer on his favourite instrument.

Another element in Elgar's education was the Worcester Glee Club, which dated from

*This membership in
Musical Organizations*



THE WOOD-WIND QUINTET PARTY

W. B. LEICESTER EDWARD ELGAR H. H. LEICESTER
(Clarinete) (Bassoon; Composer) (First Flute; Director)
 F. EXTON F. T. ELGAR
(Second Flute) (Hautboy)



EDWARD ELGAR AND HIS BROTHER
(From a photograph, 1888)

1810, and which was a well-known and highly appreciated feature of the musical life of the Faithful City. Week by week during the winter months, amateurs and cathedral singers met for mutual enjoyment, singing the fine music of the older English masters. The programme generally consisted of ten numbers, eight glees and two songs, the proceedings being invariably commenced with "Glorious Apollo," after which the smoking of pipes was in order; not with the puny briars of these degenerate days, but with antique Broseley "churchwardens," whose length suggested a dignified aloofness, and whose curling incense gave a glory to the scene.

The music was not exclusively vocal. There were instrumental nights, when the best performers of Worcester appeared in their best form. Among these was Edward Elgar's father, who could hold his own as second violin, or in case of need accompany the songs, and make himself generally useful, as well as agreeable. There was a good deal of Corelli; Haydn's symphonies were apparently inexhaustible, and the overtures to Handel's oratorios suited the conservative tastes of the

music-lovers of the staid cathedral town. The conductor of the Worcester Festival Choral Society had no patience with what was called the modern school, and the "preposterous compositions" of Schumann were by him doomed to an eternal and merciful oblivion. Naturally the city took its tone from the cathedral organist, whose geniality was the theme of general praise, and whose capacity for playing from the old vocal scores, and at a pinch from a figured bass, had earned for him the reputation of abysmal profundity.

W. H. Elgar joined the club about 1843, Edward Elgar coming about thirty years later, to play with the violins. By this time the Handel overtures were thought old-fashioned. A spirit of revolution was abroad, or if not of absolute revolution, a spirit of progressiveness. Instead of the overtures to "Saul" and "Samson" and "Esther" and the "Occasional" oratorio, all of which had been prime favourites twenty to fifty years before, there were overtures by Mozart, Rossini, Auber, Vincent Wallace, Bellini, Balfe and Bishop. The glees and madrigals of contemporary composers were added to the club's

répertoire, and innovation went so far as to introduce German part-songs. To all this varied music did the observant Edward seriously incline. (For two years he was the chief accompanist, receiving great commendation, from which he shrank as undeserved. He was a violinist, he said, not a pianist, "and for that matter anybody could play accompaniments." But the local cognoscenti thought differently, and even recognised in him an instinct for supporting and making the most of the vocalist, as well as in pulling him through when threatened by accident, or when "slightly below his usual excellent form." At the same time some of the older men were wont to declare that Master Edward was prone to put more into the music than had occurred to the composer, and that in certain cases his varied harmonies had not only startled conservative auditors, but had made the singer nervous.)

When the Society began to print its programmes, it was felt that a great advance had been made, though there were not wanting sticklers for the good old times, who shook their heads and whispered one another in the

*Elgar's Appointment to the
Position of Pianist and Con-
ductor*

ear, and prophesied upon it dangerously. In 1879 Edward Elgar was appointed pianist and conductor. Years before that an accidental absence of the leading violinist of a Worcester amateur society had given him a chance, and having shown his ability, he was promoted to the post of leader. In January 1878, he was presented with a violin bow in thankful remembrance of his services, which bow remains in his study to the present day, along with his trombone, his favourite picture of Beethoven, his scores of the masters, his choice copy of the *Spectator*, and his infinite variety of treasure.)

(The Worcester Glee Society was kind to the young musician. The name of Edward Elgar often appeared on the composer's side of the programme, his compositions showing a decided versatility. He wrote for the glee party, for the band, for the solo singers, for anything and everything, for anybody and everybody. In season and out of season he jotted down his musical thoughts whenever they occurred. And they were always occurring. All things were clothed in imaginary music. Every personality was represented by a musical expression,

and Conduct
The Attitude of the Worcester
Glee Society toward
his compositions for its
Performance

O SALUTARIS

p *Swell*

Contralto.

Sa - lu - ta - ro *Hostia - rum cae - li pan - tis os - ti - um*

mf *Bella primum hor tu - lu - a* *sa - ro - bur fer* *Cresc* *Aut e - le non* *ff*

FAC-SIMILE OF THE OPENING OF A BARITONE SOLO WITH ORGAN ACCOMPANIMENT
COMPOSED BY ELGAR WHEN A BOY, FOR THE SERVICE OF ST. GEORGE'S
ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH, WORCESTER

Elgar and

which came unbidden and unsought. The preludes and fugues, the glees and songs, the music for the wood-wind quintet were succeeded or accompanied by quadrilles and other light music written for the band of the Worcester County Lunatic Asylum, of which the composer became conductor at the age of twenty-two. One day in each week was spent at this institution, where he coached the band in the proper manipulation of their instruments, and when he had taught them to play, conducted performances which were designed to alleviate the condition of the patients, the *personnel* of the band being derived from the attendants. Again the composer had to adapt himself to unusual conditions. There was a flute, a clarinet, first and second cornets, euphonium, bombardon, double-bass, first and second violins, and piano with occasional additions and emendations. It was hard to write music to fit this extraordinary combination ; but it was done, and the Asylum Board, not unmindful of the claims of art, commissioned original quadrilles, and at the day of reckoning ambled in with five shillings per set. Thus, in defiance of the proverb, was the

prophet honoured in his own country. (At this period Elgar was scoring Christy Minstrel songs at eighteen-pence each, and sitting up all night to copy music that would have cost him three and sixpence in coin of the realm.)

Speaking of his early violinist days, he says, "When a child, I once came in wrong with a second violin passage. I shall never forget my horror. I feel it even now. I did not analyse my sensations at the time, but I know that it was an artistic horror."

While he worked in the secular world he worked in the field of sacred art. Motets, masses, all kinds of church music flowed from him in a ceaseless stream. (New music for special occasions was always forthcoming from the unofficial assistant organist, who as a boy not over well supplied with pocket money, was wont to bargain with his schoolfellow, Hubert A. Leicester, for organ-blowing; Elgar to pay by playing certain specified pieces, after which he played to please himself. Hubert A. Leicester was director of the boys' wood-wind band for which Elgar wrote many of his earliest compositions.)

Elgar's Ceaseless Stream of Sacred Music

Elgar's method of Earning Pocket money

Elgar's desire to become a Solo Violinist

III

His study of the Violin with

MANHOOD AND MARRIAGE

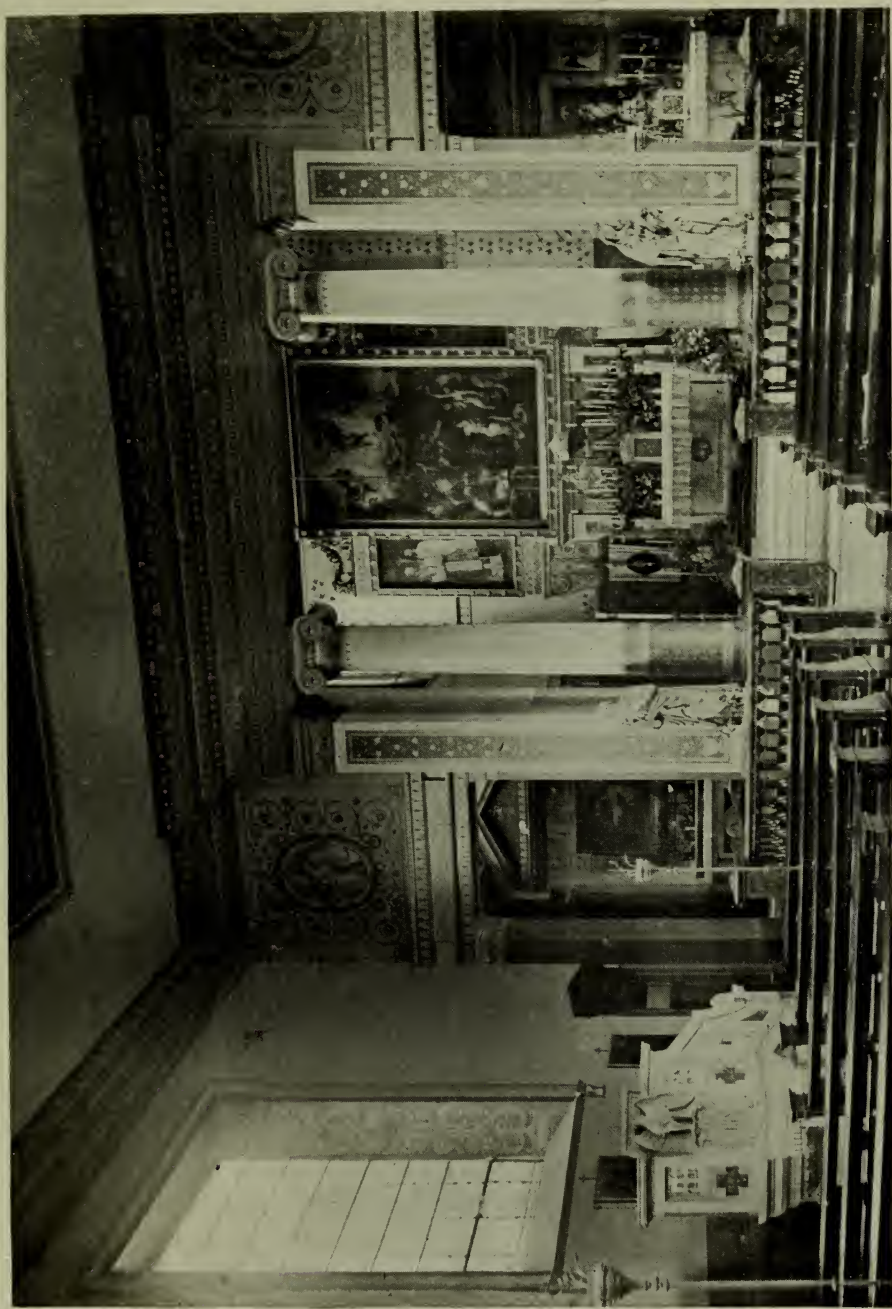
Adolf Pollitzer

FROM the age of fifteen Elgar maintained himself; and at twenty, having some notion of becoming a solo violinist, he went to London and took five lessons from Adolf Pollitzer, who ran him over his scales, showing the fingering of three octaves, these being the days of Baillot, before Schradieck appeared. The teacher also gave five pieces of music by way of solatium, and was surprised to find Elgar not only remembering the unmarked fingering, but also playing the five pieces from memory. The student continued to visit Pollitzer at intervals for some years, but in the end was not satisfied with himself. He recognised that time had been lost, and moreover the solo-violinist notion had begun to pall. The question arose, What course to take? Would he go on with the violin, or with the piano, or settle down as

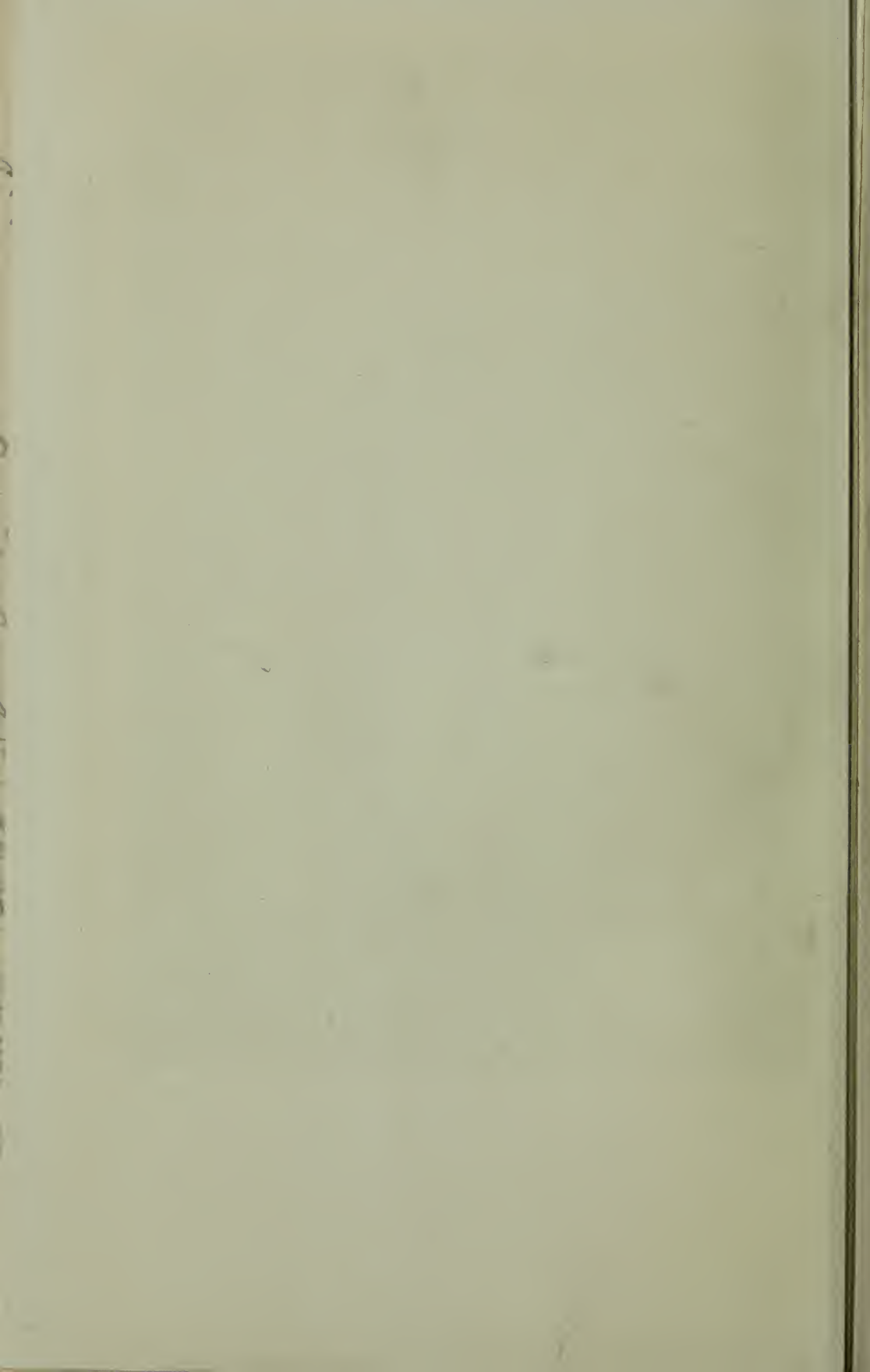
Elgar's Problem in Trying to Decide What to do Next

an organist? He took time to consider, and while he pondered he worked. *Laborare est orare*. His visions of study at Leipzig had faded into nothingness through want of funds. But he was economical, and on the last days of 1882 contrived to visit Leipzig for a holiday, and by no means "to study German methods," as has been asserted in print. His first hour brought a comic incident. On the stroke of midnight Elgar entered a hotel where a waiter, mistaking him for a New Year guest, ushered the astonished traveller into the thick of a private party standing on chairs, wearing paper caps of wonderful shapes and colours, and at the precise moment raising their glasses with shouts of "Prosit Neu-jahr!" Among this throng of revellers, Elgar, with his travelling-cap, overcoat and umbrella, must have looked like a New Year Santa Klaus. He bowed and fled without looking behind him. His first adventure at the Gewandhaus concerts brought another touch of humour. He wished to hear Schumann, then regarded as terribly advanced, and altogether too radical for the provincial orchestras of England, and if not Schumann some other revolutionary. "As I climbed the

Elgar's first Leipzig experiences while in Germany



ST. GEORGE'S ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH, WORCESTER, WHERE EDWARD ELGAR WAS ORGANIST



stairs, a little late (an exceptional thing with me), I heard a familiar strain. I was surprised and paused. Yes, it was—it was—the andante of Haydn's Surprise Symphony! There was, however, some Schumann, the Overture and Scherzo in E minor, a fine work, though the opening reminds me of Cherubini's overture to 'The Water-carrier,' not thematically, but in the pattern."

(Three years after this Elgar succeeded his father as organist of Saint George's, Worcester, and looked like settling down as an obscure provincial teacher. He continued to play the violin in orchestras, kept up his composition practice, and gave lessons. In 1889 he married the daughter of Major-General Sir Henry G. Roberts, K.C.B., a lady of musical and literary skill, who fully appreciates her husband's artistic significance; the world's indebtedness to her influence and encouragement will assuredly be made known at a future day. There is one child of the marriage, a daughter.) In the same year Elgar resigned his position as organist, and went to live in London, principally with the object of hearing good music. This was the beginning

*Elgar's marriage;
his wife*

*Elgar's removal to London,
purpose,
his plan
ring for Elgar*

*Elgar's appointment as
St. George's Worcester*

*His method of scoring by
imitation*

of his real opportunity. As a boy he had written for orchestras which he had never heard, and had gloried in the casual visits to the provinces of the Haigh-Dyer Opera Company, which gave "Norma," "La Traviata," "L'Elisire d' Amore," and other well-known operas. As a young man without means for help in study and without skilled advice he had played in all the orchestras available, at the last desk, if necessary, in order to gain experience. When he heard a sonorous passage or one that sounded thin, he would score the piece from the band parts, counting the bars and painfully ascertaining for himself why the passage had that particular effect. He had no book on Musical Form, and being struck with the symmetry of Mozart's G minor symphony, he barred out a full score and wrote and orchestrated a complete G minor symphony of his own, modulating where Mozart modulated, not slavishly, but following the master's lines with reverential closeness. To extend the catalogue of his strivings is needless. For surely enough has been said to remind the aspirant of Buffon's "capacity for infinite pains," and to convince him that Edward Elgar deserved success if

Allegro molto.

77.

Oboes

Bassoon

Horn high

Horn in G

Clarinets
(added after)

N.B. these are awful keys for Horns.

Violins

Violoncello

Viola

Cello

Double Bass

X
to be mostly in unison

OPENING OF ELGAR'S SYMPHONY WRITTEN IN 1878, AS A FORM-STUDY AFTER
MOZART'S IN G MINOR, COMPOSED IN 1788



he had never achieved it. While living in London he worked incessantly, running down to the midlands once a week to give lessons. In 1891 he went to reside permanently at Malvern, eight miles from Worcester; in 1893 the "Black Knight" was produced in his native city; and in 1896 his "Lux Christi," produced at the Worcester Festival of the Three Choirs, heralded the dawn of a new period of oratorio. In the same year came "King Olaf;" and in 1897 the "Te Deum" and "Benedictus" were produced at the Hereford Festival. The "Enigma" variations, and "Caractacus," the latter written for the Leeds Festival of 1899, and the "Sea Pictures" produced at the Norwich Festival, showed versatility, while in 1900 "The Dream of Gerontius," produced at Birmingham, attracted the attention of Julius Butts, who translated the libretto, and in December 1901 gave a performance of the work at Düsseldorf, with a success that led to a repetition at the Lower Rhine Festival of May 1902. In 1900 the University of Cambridge had conferred on the composer the honorary degree of Doctor in Music, amid universal approval and felicitation. Elgar was

*Elgar's
Removal*

*to a
Permanent
Residence*

*The
Production
of*

*Several
of
Elgar's*

Compositions

*The University of Cambridge
conferred the Honorary Degree of
Doctor of Music upon Elgar
his Renunciation of the Order of the Bath and the Order of the Red Cross*

forty-three. If ever musician showed tenacity Elgar was the man. Few indeed are found who, without teachers, and in the face of suppression, have the courage to toil on with upward eye and never-failing heart for thirty years. The inclusion of his name in the list of birthday honours of 1904 did honour to the list, and from that moment "Sir Edward" instead of the clumsier "Dr." Elgar became a household word. His career is as remarkable for its patient tenacity as for its genius. It was at Hereford, in 1903, that he said to the writer, in quiet casual response : "Yes, I sometimes think that if I had not been rather persevering, I should never have done anything at all." With which all who know will remain in hearty accord.)

IV

EDWARD ELGAR AT HOME

IT was in the "Black Knight" period that I first visited the composer at "Forli," a charming cottage under the shadow of the Malvern Hills, meet situation for the dreamy tone-poet, the creator of ravishing harmonies. It was the riotous summer. The hedge of the lawn before the house was in flower, and the wicket opened amid poetic blooms. Close at hand was a larger lawn, a pleasaunce of sloping banks and smooth-shaven turf, whereon was a sunny tent, the opening of which commanded a glorious valley, extending to the purple horizon. "Forty miles and never a brick!" ejaculated mine host, as we took our seats in this ideal retreat, where were easy chairs, a table and a couch which reminded me of Rossini dashing off operas in bed. There, too, was a proof copy of "Lux Christi," afterwards called "The Light

of Life," concerning which we held sweet converse together. The Worcester Festival was due in a few months, and the composer felt that much depended on the success of this, his first choral work to be heard at an important meeting. Overflowing with enthusiasm, he spoke rapidly and continuously of the state of musical art in England, deploring the fate of works commissioned for festivals, which, after painstaking and elaborate production, were heard no more. His bearing was that of one in deadly earnest, not wholly inaccessible to the jocular, but too intent on his aim to waste time on anything not directly leading to the goal. He laughed but rarely, and his mirth was soon checked. In the heat of the early struggle, and with the winning-post in sight, his mind seemed occupied with a fixed resolve to make the world aware of the power he believed to be his own. "King Olaf" was in hand, and the tent was littered with sheets of music-paper bearing myriad pencil marks, undecipherable to the stranger as the hieroglyphics on a blackbird's egg, and, like the proverbial lost pocket-book, of no use to any one but the owner. From the tent-pole a flag fluttered

Elgar's Estimate of the Fugue

in the breeze, delicate hint that the composer was at work, and must not be lightly disturbed. But, as he explained, the restriction was more in jest than in earnest, and the flag was frequently struck.

Of a fugue in "The Light of Life" he said: "I thought a fugue would be expected of me. The British public would hardly tolerate oratorio without fugue. So I tried to give them one. Not a 'barn-door' fugue, but one with an independent accompaniment. There's a bit of canon, too, and in short, I hope there's enough counterpoint to give the real British religious respectability!" All this of course in badinage. Questioned as to his actual feeling for the perpetuation of the fugal style, he rose and walked rapidly about, as is his custom when interested. "It has been done," he said. "Bach has done it. No man has a greater reverence for Bach than I. I play three or four preludes and fugues from the 'Well-tempered Klavier every day.' No. 33, in E major, is one of my favourites. No. 31 is another, and No. 29, a wonderful masterpiece, is constantly before me. But my veneration for Bach is no reason why I should

Elgar's Views of Contrapuntal Rules and Restrictions

imitate Bach. I certainly can't beat Bach in the Bach manner, and if any one asks me why I don't write in the Bach style, I think I shall say, 'It has been done, once and for ever—by Bach !' (You were talking of contrapuntal rules and restrictions. I have gone over them all : marked, learned, and inwardly digested everything available in theoretical instruction I could come across (and I think I have come across most of what has been written) ; and I cherish a profound respect for the old theorists. They were useful in their day, but they were not entitled to lay down hard and fast rules for all composers to the end of time.")

He paused and walked out into the sunshine.

"My idea," he continued, "is that there is music in the air, music all around us, the world is full of it and—(here he raised his hands, and made a rapid gesture of capture)—and—you—simply—simply—take as much as you require !"

Truly a short compendium of the bookish theorick, and as satisfactory as short, the only important objection being occasional absence of the Elgarian grip.

(Not music only, but books and literature,

Elgar As a Book Enthusiast

Elgar's Assertion "That there is music in the air"

came under review on this occasion. The composer revealed himself as a book enthusiast, a haunter of the remoter shelves of the second-hand shops, with a leaning to the rich and rare. In the sitting-room was a grand piano, in the study a smaller instrument, surrounded by books, and books, and more books. He declared himself a devoted reader of all kinds of literature, and chuckled over a novel wherein an orchestra was described as awaiting the fall of the conductor's bâton, the trumpeters with their instruments pressed to their lips in eager anticipation, the piece being the introduction to the "Messiah" overture. Referring to his leaning to the *leit-motiv*, he said that his early studies in this direction were based on Mendelssohn, long before he had seen or heard a note of Wagner. His sketch-books of twenty years before contain experiments in all kinds of curious rhythms, 5-4, 7-4, 15-4, and even 11-4, of which the only published result seems to be the 7-4 "Lament" in "Caractacus."

It was during this visit that Elgar spoke of a Malvern book club, a sort of literary federation, of which he was the first member, which enabled Malvern readers to know each other's

*Elgar's leaning
to the
leit-motiv
and his
experiments
in the
use of
curious
Rhythms*

libraries, the late Mrs. Lynn Linton being an enthusiastic supporter. The surrounding piles of books were expressive of the man, but other features of the study spoke his many-sidedness. A large portrait of Wagner was conspicuous, and a board over the fireplace displayed in poker-work an ascending flash of chromatic semi-quavers. "The Fire-motive," he said, "from the 'Ring of the Nibelungen'; one of my own attempts at decoration." A cosy room, with quaint bric-a-brac from foreign lands; bits of carving from the Bavarian Highlands, then his annual summer resort. He showed the silver buttons of his waistcoat as specimens of Bavarian handicraft, described the character of the people, and pointing to the score of the "Light of Life" said he wrote the beginning of number three recitative and chorus, "As Jesus passed by," six thousand feet above the sea-level.

"It has at least that claim to be called high art," he remarked airily.

Tacked lightly to the wall was an uproarious illustrated joke cut from a German newspaper, and in a dim corner a photograph of a thirteenth-century panel sculpture of the Crucifixion from

*Elgar's Frontiers
Recreations*

Worcester Cathedral. "It shows a wonderful feeling," he remarked, as he looked upon it lovingly. Presently he spoke of recreations, and declared a liking for golf, remarking that if not of the first force he was certainly animated by the best intentions. He was for some time a follower of the American craze for kite-flying, with its aerial photography and its scientific aims, desiring to invent a compensating kite that should adapt itself to whatsoever currents it might meet in its celestial course. Kites, it seemed, were not to be relied on in unexpected emergencies. Sailing away in a suitable wind, and giving promise of irreproachable conduct, they were apt suddenly to jib, to fly in the wrong direction, to bolt, kick, plunge, buck, cavort, and to be guilty of other deplorable excesses. It was his hope to restrain these unregenerate tendencies, to break in and bridle the innate *diablerie* of the fiery untamed kite in a state of nature, and by taking much thought to compose a kite that might be useful. Nothing came of it except the fall of his neighbour's spouting, and the occasional employment of a powerful navy to pull down the rebellious thing from the central blue.

(Looking at Elgar's music, one may see in its general audacity the spirit of one who would invent a flying-machine. "Eripuit cœlo fulmen" may surely be said of him. But if he has snatched fire from heaven, the feat was not accomplished by means of "long-tailed," or "square-tailed," or "bob-tailed" kites.)

(In these pleasant days at "Forli," he declared his musical creed to be a love of everything that was good, whatever its style or period. He would go a hundred miles to hear a Wagner opera, and would enjoy a Haydn quartette, if a good example. Music, he thought, should be progressive ; to stand still was to perish, or at least to degenerate. He would have enjoyed working on opera, but wanted both subject and libretto. Such was Edward Elgar three months before the production of "The Light of Life.")

Elgar's Musical Creed

A Description of

EDWARD ELGAR TO-DAY

"YOU are prone to imagine there are several Dr. Elgars, according to the clothes and the circumstances in which you see him. There is one in evening dress pacing the corridor of a concert-room, in which a conductor is taking Elgarian works at unauthorised tempi. There is another in rough tweed and leggings, who frequents unfrequented lanes with chosen friends, who, armed with a spirit lamp and other impedimenta, take tea under hedges 'like tramps.' A third, wearing an elaborate waistcoat, smokes genially in front of his own poker-work 'fire-music,' burnt on the panel over the study grate. A fourth walks slowly along the Worcester High Street, buried in a battered Panama pulled down to his chin. A fifth, attired in the customary suit of solemn black, ambulates *lento*, as though weary, in

the precincts of a cathedral during a Three Choir Festival. This one wears a tall silk hat, crushed down on the forehead, and gives the impression of a distinguished colonel home for a year's holiday, and at present attending a funeral. Dr. Elgar is tall, spare, angular, grave and courteous. He will listen with attention to skilled comment on his work, but gives short shrift to aggressive incompetence. Shadowy legends exist of patronising persons who were made to regret the indestructibility of matter, and to wish themselves well out of the Cosmos."

This description, written by me for a London journal in October 1903, though in jocular vein, has been accepted by many good Elgarians, and on this account may be allowed to stand. There are also several Dr. Elgars of mood, and to describe these would indeed be a delicate task. There is the Dr. Elgar of few words and preoccupied manner; one who gives the uninitiated the impression of unearthly solemnity. At the other extreme is the brilliant and cultured talker, running over with enthusiasm, full of ideas about all things in heaven and earth, and with clear-cut



EDWARD ELGAR IN 1902

(From a photograph by E. Holding)

opinions he is not afraid to express. There is also the good listener, who will give ear to the opinions of others on music, and on his own music, with what looks like abnormal patience and humility. "All I require," he says, "is that they shall know something about it." He is a dramatic *raconteur*, and his description of an unseen band heard at a seaside resort in Italy was something memorable. Intensely humorous were the "peep, peep" of the clarinets, the "pom, pom" of the trombones, and above all the unwritten rush of the bass trombone from tonic to dominant by means of the chromatic scale. Dr. Elgar is not a great laugher in point of cachinnation. He laughs internally, deeply, silently. Still he laughs out occasionally, though seldom. His laugh is not melodious. Rather is it harmonic, a dissonance, a sort of minor-second that is never resolved. The one laugh specially noted was, however, a benevolent laugh, bestowed on one who had told a story for which it was clear that he expected a laugh. And Elgar laid the sacrifice on the shrine of friendship.)

His new home, Craeg Lea (which name con-

Elgar's
Home

ceals an anagram), three miles from the old, is just so much nearer to the "Caractacus" hill. Some other things have changed since the "Lux Christi" period, though little or no change is seen in Elgar himself. A significant addition to the drawing-room ornamentation is the big wreath given after "Gerontius" at Dusseldorf. Nowadays he speaks not all of the future but of the past, of "Gerontius" at Sheffield, at Hanley, at Hereford, at Manchester. Drifting into general conversation he thinks musicians need good education. More culture is desirable for vocalists. Too many depend on their voices and a popular repertory. He regrets worship of mere technique, and declares that the uncultured violinist plays without convincing, whatever his technical skill. And human experience is needed. To hear the cleverest youth play a great concerto is like hearing a boy preacher. There is no authority. Yes, education is needed by musicians, and outdoor life. (His own love of the open air is owing to his having as a boy lived at Broadheath, three miles from Worcester, which meant constant walking to and fro. Golf is a grand game, because you

Some of Elgar's Philosophies

Elgar's Hobbies

can't think of anything else when playing. Bicycling is good; did thirty miles the other day, and was stopped by the snow. During railway journeys amuses himself with cryptograms; solved one by John Holt Schooling who defied the world to unravel his mystery.) Led back to music, he takes the trombone and plays a little, to exemplify what can be written with good effect, and presently wandering to books, suggests that if people would index good books instead of writing music, there would be some sense in it. As to his ideals, he would like to see a permanent opera in England, and for his personal fancy would like to write all the music he feels without being called upon to superintend its production. He expresses a strong desire to know everything about everything, from an iron foundry to a printing machine, and episodically dilates on the pond aquarium in the drawing-room, describing the habits of its queer inmates, occasionally stimulating their enthusiasm with a long spoon, by means of which he handles them as if he loved them. There is a fellow who rolls himself up in moss and leaves and pretends he is not there, and another who sports a green jacket

*Elgar's
Professors
Breadth
Elgar's
Ideals*

and poses as a bit of leaf. There are fresh-water shrimps and snails and tadpoles, in which he seems to take as much interest as in oratorio. His talk is presto scherzando, and while he talks he stands or walks about, that as interest increases at any point he may get at his audience effectively. But for his pipe he would lack repose; the pipe saves the situation. He has been accused of a cold and scathing sarcasm, but this would depend on the subject and the constitution of the listener. When rehearsing a choir who were tamely giving a chorus on "The Sword" in "Caractacus," he said, "You appear to be singing of putting up an umbrella." (His nervous sensibility may sometimes place him at a disadvantage, but those who best know him speak in praise of his large-hearted sympathy and desire to help where help is needed. Miss Marie Hall told the writer how much she owed to Edward Elgar, who took her up when she was nine, and gave her lessons at his home, a fact strangely ignored by Miss Hall's biographers. When the blind musician, William Wolstenholme, composed his degree exercise, it was Edward Elgar who committed the work

*Elgar's
Large Heartedness*

Elgar's manner of talking

to paper from the composer's dictation, devoting many afternoons to this laborious, self-imposed task. Then he went to Oxford with his friend to act as his amanuensis in the examination room. (Teaching was not always agreeable to Edward Elgar. "To teach the right pupils was a pleasure," he once said; "but teaching in general was to me like turning a grindstone with a dislocated shoulder.")

Elgar's Attitude
toward the
Work of Teaching

VI

THE PROGRESS OF ELGAR

A REVIEW of Elgar's published works impresses by the musicianship and finish which mark the earliest ; the absence of clearly traceable influence ; the general sense of beauty ; the growing individuality and gradually increasing importance combined with proportionate depth and complexity. There are, of course, certain fluctuations in point of æsthetic quality. Beethoven did not always write on the level of the Fifth Symphony, and Elgar is not always at his best. But there is nothing trivial, nothing unworthy a serious musician. The "Ave Verum" of Op. 1 looks like a boyish work with a bar or two of the "Gerontius" period at the close, the only hint of Elgar-character in the motet, which is graceful, smooth-flowing, and normal, if not commonplace enough to be popular. It was in 1885 that Mr. William Cole Stockley, of

THE PROGRESS OF ELGAR 45

Birmingham, thought a piece in the Mauresque style, since published as Op. 10, good enough for production at one of his orchestral concerts, this being Elgar's first appearance as a composer outside Worcester. "So far the prestige of the Three Choir meetings had been denied to him, save as a performer among the violins, but his compatriots at last, on the unmistakable verdict of others, accorded him a chance at the Worcester Festival of 1890, when his overture "Froissart" was produced, title and conception being due to a speech of Claverhouse in "Old Mortality." Looking over the score of this first overture, one marvels that recognition was deferred for years. Its vigour, invention, scoring are far above the average hack-work of festival productions. "Froissart" has the true fire, the undeniable magic of inspiration. True, Joseph Bennett told Elgar to "go on," but he was practically alone. If the critics had known enough, or if knowing enough they had dared, they might have paraphrased what Macaulay said of Milton's "Ode on the Morning of Christ's Nativity," namely, that any one stanza was enough to prove that a great genius was born to the world. Yet the "Times" could

only laugh at Elgar for using the double-bassoon.) (The Twelve Organ Voluntaries, Op. 14, sold to a publisher for five pounds, showed a certain something above and beyond mere cleverness, while the "Chanson de Matin" and "Chanson de Nuit," published later, might have made the composer's name popular as a writer of acceptable small things. But "Froisart" was a bid for something higher, and a successful bid, though most of the critics accorded nothing more than the regulation "safety" commendation. Opus 20, a String Serenade for orchestra, is of surpassing loveliness. Its beauty is of Schubertian intensity, though of different character. Only a master could have written this gem-like piece, which incidentally exemplifies Elgar's perfect adaptability to the means proposed. The Serenade is for strings, not only nominally, but in its very essence. Scored for full orchestra, the piece would lose its character, its reason of being. Here Elgar thought "in strings," as elsewhere he "thinks in full score." The Serenade is a favourite piece with amateur orchestras, and one could wish that Elgar had written more music of this type. He thinks well of the

*A Description of some of Elgar's
Other Compositions, - The Twelve
Voluntaries, Op. 14, the Chanson de Matin
Chanson de Nuit, Op. 20, a String Serenade
for Orchestra, The Black Knight, Op. 25,
"Der Schwarze Ritter (A Cantata)" The*

Serenade ; even after the "Apostles," he said, " I like it as well as anything I have done." A number of small pieces intervened between this and his first published cantata, " The Black Knight," Op. 25, produced by a Worcester Choral Society in 1893, then heard at Wolverhampton and Birmingham, and before long all over England. A setting of Longfellow's translation of Uhland's weird poem, " Der Schwarze Ritter," the cantata is of the choral-ballad type, the music modern with a touch of audacity, the chorus only part of the means for obtaining tone-colour, the orchestra treated with great skill, the whole work dramatic, striking, picturesque, and, above all, with a distinct individuality, an Elgar-flavour already detected by the connoisseurs. It is noteworthy that Elgar calls " The Black Knight " a symphony for chorus and orchestra. The Choral Suite, " From the Bavarian Highlands," is an instance of the composer's versatility of mood ; here all is facile and placid. The spirit of his summer holiday resort is caught, but the melodies are his own. This Elgar is the Elgar of the Twelve Voluntaries, the Coronation Ode, and the Pomp and Circumstance Marches, of which, by the

Chor.
Choral Suite "From the Bavarian Highlands,"
the Coronation Ode, the Pomp and
Circumstance Marches,

way, the number is not two, but six. "Why should a composer always write in an exacting spirit?" he asks. "Why not relax the bow occasionally? My conception of a composer's duty includes his being a bard for the people. He ought to write a popular tune sometimes. The Coronation was a popular function. As to the marches, I have been much among military men, and I have wondered why the quick march, which is what soldiers really march to, has never been treated symphonically. Soldiers too often march to the most trivial music. Why not try to give them something a little better?" These words of Elgar may serve as answer to certain hostile criticisms.

The Organ Sonata, Opus 28, was accepted as strong and new, and "Lux Christi," later named "The Light of Life," Op. 29, Elgar's first choral work to be heard at a festival, produced at the Worcester meeting of 1896, confirmed the opinion of the few who saw in the composer original creative power, with adequate equipment of technique. The subject afforded scope for expressive writing but public interest in the restoration of the blind man's sight and the spiritual applica-

*The Genius and Popularity of Elgar's
Organ Sonata Op. 28 and
"Lux Christi" or "The Light of Life"
Op. 29*

tion of the miracle lacked intensity, though the music is dramatic and the libretto, by the Rev. E. Capel-Cure, could hardly be bettered. Here are movements which in form, if not in spirit, remind us of the older choral writers, though the *leit-motiv* is used. The cantata did not become so popular as was predicted, but the introductory "Meditation," played everywhere, kept the name of Elgar in the programmes. A few weeks after the Worcester Festival came the North Staffordshire meeting at Hanley, and "King Olaf" was given to the world.

"King Olaf" was so much bigger than the "Lux Christi," that even those who best knew Elgar rubbed their eyes in something like amazement. It was stronger than the most sanguine had expected. The musicians who had believed that music had done its utmost were taken aback, and required a period of seclusion in order to grapple with the unexpected situation. By "King Olaf" many were convinced that there was still a possibility of something new; that striking individuality without extravagance was not altogether visionary; that the dry bones of science could still be clothed with life; that the old con-

Elgar's "King Olaf"

trapuntists and the new impressionists had not exhausted the permutations of artistic melody and harmony; that, in short, an original and powerful genius could fuse into a consistent whole all that was best in the old and new schools; could reconcile Bach and Berlioz, Handel and Wagner, and all this, not as a mere eclectic, but rather as an innovator, an assimilator who had made all his own; brilliant in invention, rich in imagination, and a skilled craftsman in the most subtle and recondite workmanship.

"King Olaf" is strong, graphic, giving a sense of the folk-song, a savour of the sea, an impression of the Berserker spirit. Elgar has given invention free rein; is more himself than ever; is breaking away from whatever compound of influences had dominated before. His orchestration is richer; he becomes audacious. Effects heard later in "Gerontius" are tried in "King Olaf"; a soprano air, doubled in the bass two and three octaves below, is weird in the one, awe-inspiring in the other. "Olaf" displays a great variety of moods; Longfellow's words are cleverly connected and reinforced by Mr. H. A. Acworth. So

far Elgar has fared well with the librettists. Fastidious as Mendelssohn, he is more fortunate. Throughout "Olaf" is shown a greater command of the theme-system, a magistral handling to convince the most incredulous. Only in the solo writing is there room for doubt as to whether the master has attained his full stature. From the Saga Theme at the beginning to the Death of Olaf and the Epilogue, all is consistent, homogeneous, fascinating. Not a dull number, not a needless bar. The Challenge of Thor, the Return of Olaf, the Conversion, the Episodes of Gudrun, the Wraith of Odin, and Sigrid and Thyri, succeed each other naturally, interest growing to the end. Here in the realms of imagination we feel the very breath of romance; we are in touch with the noblest old-world chivalry. And after this the same mind produces the "Cockaigne" overture and "The Apostles" oratorio. A genius of many facets, which may be its secret. A receptive nature, saturated with the tints that make the rainbow of beauty.

(After "King Olaf" the next works that arrest attention are the "Te Deum" and "Benedic-

*The true greatness of
Elgar's Te Deum and
Benedictus*

tus," written for the Hereford Festival of 1897; Elgar, the Roman Catholic, choosing the English words, while Sir Hubert Parry for a later Hereford Festival, and Sir Charles Stanford for a Leeds Festival, elected for the Latin. There is no setting of the Ambrosian hymn that can be compared with Elgar's in point of distinctive character. It may be argued that the music is not church music, that it is not English music, that it is not good music. To all or any of these charges one might listen with patience and due show of respect. Further, one might believe that between Purcell's "Te Deum" and that of Elgar there were better "Te Deums" than Elgar's, and that Dvorak's or Verdi's outdid him in freedom of style. But it could never be maintained that there was a "Te Deum" of like mood and feeling. The introduction is calculated to startle good men and true whose standard is found in the work of English church musicians. The very phrasing of the words is new and alarming. There is, however, much delicious music, full enjoyment of which comes to many only after a struggle with prepossessions. The short strain for orchestra before the words,

Importance

"Make them to be numbered with Thy Saints," may be specially commended to Elgar students as Elgar-in-excelsis. It recurs, in triple measure, before "Vouchsafe, O Lord," and is given to the voices at "O Lord, in Thee have I trusted." This and the passage at the mezzoforte of the introduction are so Elgaresque that they sound like soul-transcriptions. In them we have the quintessence of the dominant Elgar mood.)

(The "Caractacus" cantata, though magnificent, and, moreover, eminently successful on production, did not take hold of the British imagination. Not far from Elgar's house, the great hill known as the Herefordshire Beacon, with its vast system of pre-historic fortifications attributed to the Silures, rears its scarred flanks to the clouds, and this, no doubt, inspired Elgar with the "Caractacus" idea. The cantata is built on modern lines, and in point of structure may be compared with "King Olaf," and though perhaps with more elaboration, possibly with an occasional want of theme-dignity, rare fault in this composer. Still there is marked advance: the solo voices are treated with greater consideration. There is marked progress of orchestral technique.

*"Elgar's 'Caractacus' Cantata
the source of its
inspiration and
the Leeds and Birmingham Festivals*

"Caractacus" did not touch the masses, was not played upon the barrel-organs, but it served the great purpose of marking the composer's increasing recognition. For some occult reason the Leeds and Birmingham Festivals are accounted superior in prestige to the Three Choir Festivals. To be heard at Leeds is to be received among those born in the purple. Received, for the moment only. It is for the man to make good his footing, to sustain his claim, or for ever after to hold his peace. The Festivals of Leeds and Birmingham give prestige to success. But failure at either is irreparable. To go down at a Three Choir Festival is not so serious—there is consolation in the company of the majority. You are only one of the noble army of martyrs. To fail at the bigger festivals is to fall like Lucifer, never to rise again.

Elgar did not fall. His star was in the ascendant. Step by step he moved from one coign of vantage to another, rising always. "Caractacus" is numbered Op. 35. The "Enigma" orchestral piece is Op. 36. What the solution of the "Enigma" may be, nobody but the composer knows. The theme is a counter-

*Elgar's star was in the
ascendant*

point on some well-known melody which is never heard, the variations are the theme seen through the personalities of friends, with an intermezzo and a coda, the last added at the request of friends aided and abetted by Dr. Richter, who accepted the work on its merits, having received the score in Vienna from his agent in London, and who at the time had not met with the composer.

The extraordinary ingenuity of Elgar in varying the rather unpromising theme is as surprising as his intimate knowledge of the orchestra, that vast repository of mysteries.

The "Enigma" variations, "toured" by Richter's band, set the seal on Elgar's reputation. Richter did for Elgar what he had done for Wagner thirty years before. England was won for Wagner by Richter and the "Tannhauser" Overture. England was won for Elgar by Richter and the "Enigma" variations.)

The noble song-cycle of "Sea Pictures" for contralto, produced in the same year, showed Elgar's versatility once more; and then came "Gerontius," which was to make his reputation international, and to demonstrate that, with opportunity and encouragement, the really strong man goes from strength to strength.

*Richter's
Contribution
to the
Popularization
of Richter*

The Compositions that raised Elgar to Master-rank
The Dream of Gerontius

(It was "King Olaf" that raised Elgar to master-rank, and the "Enigma" variations that made him widely known. But for historical importance, neither of these works can compete with his cantata "The Dream of Gerontius," produced at the Birmingham Triennial Festival of 1900, a memorable epoch in the annals of English music. The success of "Caractacus" at Leeds led the Birmingham authorities to the consideration of Elgar's merit, discovery of which had unaccountably escaped them for several years. And so it came to pass that "Gerontius" was completed, not written for the Festival. The music of "Gerontius" was no extemporaneous production. From the year 1889 Elgar had been studying the poem, a copy of which was given to him as a wedding present by Father Knight, of Worcester. Not an ordinary copy, but one in which Gordon's favourite passages were indicated throughout. The cantata existed in Elgar's mind when the commission came. For years he had been making sketches, at all times and places, just as the ideas came ; selecting, rejecting, jotting down items when out walking ; making

*Elgar's Speed in Com-
posing and
Writing
music*

THE PROGRESS OF ELGAR 57

memoranda on the return home, the whole gradually ripening in his mind, slowly assuming shape, condensing from the possible to the actual, like the nebulous haze of which new worlds are made. Other irons were in the fire. Elgar confesses to being engaged on twenty works at once.) But "Gerontius" went on intermittently, maturing, growing as the oak grows, slowly perhaps, but naturally and enduringly. There was no hurry : nobody requested an epoch-making work ; nobody expected an epoch-making work from Elgar. That is, nobody among the Festival authorities. It may be that the circumstances suited the composer whose failing leans to over-fastidiousness, and who, above all things, desires to satisfy himself, his severest critic. Not that he is essentially slow. So far he has not, like Mozart, dashed off three symphonies in six weeks ; but his facility is remarkable, and in the matter of scoring, one or two accomplished feats rank with the phenomenal. A musician who can throw off thirty sheets of heaviest scoring in a week need not be ashamed to meet his enemies in the gate.)

*To his Origin and Story of
"Gerontius" Set to Music by
Elgar*

(Edward Elgar was not the first to ponder a musical setting of "Gerontius." The subject was tempting. From the earliest period of which we have any record, the mind of man has striven to peer beyond the portals of the grave. And whether it was Plato arguing for immortality, or Shakespeare discussing the Undiscovered Country, "the bourne from which no traveller returns," the speculation has ever been, as it ever must be, of highest interest to the minds of men. Of all attempts to remove the veil, perhaps that of Cardinal Newman is the most powerful, the most absorbing. The death-bed of a dear friend inspired the poem, which was first printed in the midsummer of 1865, some thirty years before any composer, greatly daring, ventured to set it to music. And no wonder. The theme is a lofty one, and proportionately exacting. Gerontius on his death-bed dreams that his soul speeds through space to the invisible realm where the ministering angels of the great white throne wait with ineffable welcome. The way has terrors; there is doubt, there is apprehension. The mocking cries of demons are heard, fiendish discords clash with

the celestial strains of angels and archangels and all the company of heaven. From first to last the poet deals with themes which are at once entrancing to minds of religious inclination, and eminently susceptible of musical illustration. Here was a glorious opportunity, a wonderful libretto that in an age which was thought to have utilised every opportunity for oratorio, was lying like a derelict avoided by mariners as being too heavy with treasure. The poet is mystic, rapt, sublime, as far removed from the prosaic materialism of the age as Thomas of Celano, reputed writer of the "Dies Iræ." To wed the lofty phantasy of Newman to adequate music required a like aloofness of spirit as well as equal inspiration. After a whole generation of waiting, the hour came, and with it the man.

(The work of Edward Elgar has been accepted as adequate by judges of independent thought. The English public did not at first find in "Gerontius" an art-work of authentic inspiration. They listened with becoming respect, but they were disappointed. Elgar spoke a language of which they knew not the idiom. They looked for the suave airs

The first impression of Gerontius by the English Public.

and overwhelming choruses of orthodox oratorio. Their conceptions were conventional. Consciously or unconsciously every sacred work of any pretension is compared with "Messiah" and "Elijah," which were long regarded as the nearest approach to the unattainable ideal. The rank and file of the first hearers of "Gerontius" expected melodic parallels to "He shall feed His flock" and "O rest in the Lord," with brave choral outbursts like the "Hallelujah Chorus" and "Thanks be to God." And so it was, that, under the influence of conservative prepossessions, they felt at the close as though they had been sent empty away. Even the musicians were doubtful. The thing was so strange, so unprecedented, and, from the accustomed view-point, so revolutionary, that all except the most advanced took time to consider. The conservative mind is necessarily slow. There was a period of neglect which promised to be indefinite, and possibly to stretch out until the crack of doom. Then came the Düsseldorf performances and the outspoken verdict of the main body of German critics, whose prevailing tone was enthusiastic welcome mingled with astonishment.)

*How the English Musicians were disappointed
impressed by Elgar's Gerontius.*

The story of Elgar's appreciation in Germany constitutes a remarkable phase of a remarkable career, and deserves a whole volume to itself. Long ago Schumann said : "English composer, no composer ;" and the saying sank deep into the hearts of his countrymen, who in later years looked upon English music as meaning Arthur Sullivan and the "Mikado." England was admired for her energy, her success in colonisation, her enormous commercial prosperity ; and the best German thinkers held that herein lay her strength. And for this reason they declared that her art-feeling was atrophied, and that she was destitute of the spirit that could produce a Beethoven, or even a Mendelssohn. No serious English music was heard at any great German festival. No English composer had been honoured at the Lower Rhine meetings since the days of Onslow, seventy years before "Gerontius" ; and Onslow, who could hardly be called an Englishman at all, remains uncertain. The musical intellect of Germany had long regarded the regular festival-commissioned examples of English oratorio as more or less feeble echoes of Handel and Mendelssohn, without

distinctive character, puny weaklings of German paternity, born in a land where serious music was an exotic insusceptible of acclimatisation. From time to time strong appeals against what was called the injustice of this estimate, which had become traditional, were made without avail. Germany obstinately refused to listen. German programmes remained without English works of importance, and German musicians were stigmatised by their English *confrères* as jealous and intolerant. Under these circumstances, which were notorious, the bare fact of the inclusion of Elgar's work in the programme of the Düsseldorf meeting had a significance which appealed irresistibly to Elgar's countrymen, the verdict of the German press aroused renewed attention, and "Geron-tius," which had suffered severely from a bad performance on its production at Birmingham, was reconsidered. Soon it was heard in most of the musical centres of Great Britain, and everywhere with approbation. Little by little conductors and their forces, and, in due course, their audiences, grasped the idea that the work was to be judged by its intrinsic merit, and not by comparison with standards more or less

outworn ; that while the older masters looked upon form as a primary essential, Elgar attached a supreme importance to expression, and that much might be said for the logical accuracy of the later view.)

(The subject of "Gerontius," we can well believe, peculiarly appealed to Elgar's temperament. From the first we have a mystic atmosphere. The opening strain of the prelude indicates a sense of apprehension at thought of the Unknown. A short link, expressive of fear, introduces a prayer which again leads to a movement representing the troubled slumber of sickness, and this again to the sorrow theme, one of the most poignant and strikingly original in the whole work. After this the prayer theme is repeated fortissimo, and a gradual diminuendo on a reference to the sorrow theme, introduces the "Go forth" theme, which, with others given in the epitomistic introduction, is later heard from the voices, either in solo or chorus. The slumber theme and the theme which expresses dread of the Unknown are repeated, and with what has been called the death theme this profoundly impressive movement ends.)

The Subject of "Gerontius" appealed to Elgar's temperament.

To proceed in detail through the cantata is neither practicable nor desirable. The structure of the prelude, roughly hinted above, will convey to those familiar with the modern method of working with leading motives some notion of the main framework of "Gerontius." The themes already indicated are heard again and again, singly or in combination; sometimes given with elementary simplicity, sometimes with an extreme subtilty that demands from the hearer closest attention and keenest critical faculty. One recognises why the music failed to succeed at once. The average concert-goer was not prepared either for the strangeness of the mood or the complexity of the music, a strangeness which startled, a complexity which demanded unwonted mental exertion. In Britain the popular notion of music is of something pleasant and ear-tickling; something lightly sensuous, as well as gently stimulating and refreshing. English audiences are seldom inclined to the studious, and therefore are rarely prepared to take serious composition with deep seriousness. Their conception of the loftiest music is, in the main, sentimental and though senti-

mentality may be secular or religious, it remains but sentimentality with hardly a chemical trace of the intellectual. Not that the English are alone in this weakness. It is this false conception which has given the fatuous name of "The Moonlight" to one of the most tragic sonatas of Beethoven, to cite a solitary instance of its shallow self-betrayal. No wonder that "Gerontius" fell flat. That the work had a certain beauty could not be denied: here and there the forceful sincerity of the composer carried momentary conviction. There were passages that ran in the head, not as snatches of tune that could be hummed, but as impressions that remained in the brain though they could not be hummed. Or perhaps it would be better to say that the impression was in the heart. Despite a certain doubtfulness, the music had you in its grip and would not let you go. Repeated hearings deepened the impression of power, and slowly conviction grew that here was a work of extreme subjectiveness, of wonderful individuality, conjoined with adequate equipment of technique and vivifying creative genius. Surely the sincerity of Elgar

in "Gerontius" can scarcely be matched in the whole realm of music. The successive pages range over a vast field of emotions, from the very Alpha to the Omega of religious sensibility. Hideous demoniac outcries have their antitheses in hymns of celestial thanksgiving, and between these extremes we have the self-communings of Gerontius, the reassuring utterances of the Guardian Angel and the Angel of the Agony, the music everywhere conveying a sense of deep passion, masterly command of means, and, best of all, the absolute sincerity without which no art can be truly great. (The subject of "Gerontius" recalls Strauss and the "Tod und Verklärung;" but here, at all events, the two masters have little in common. Strauss impresses me as looking from the outside, as taking his inspiration from external things. With Elgar the opposite impression is paramount. Moreover, the English composer appeals to me, for one, as more purely intellectual, more delicately refined, as well as more spiritually emotional. Many, indeed, find in Elgar a preponderance of the emotional over the intellectual. This is no doubt a question of

*The Subject of Elgar's
"Gerontius"; The Source of
Elgar's Tonal Urges; The
Meaning of Sacred Music*

the personal equation. Every hearer is under the dominion of the heredity, education and environment which are summed in his temperament. Many musicians, especially those engaged in the service of the Church, are insensibly biassed by their diatonic proclivities, by the Puritan plainness which in some quarters is thought to be the only music well-pleasing to the Lord. No doubt Elgar in "Gerontius" is influenced by the higher colour affected in the Roman Church, in whose music he took active part during his childhood, youth, and much of his manhood. No doubt it is true that the emotional side of "Gerontius" is unwontedly rich, but no cultured and faithful musician can hear the music or that of "Olaf" or of "The Apostles" without conviction of an intellectuality at once all-pervading and intense. Moreover, the educated listener will in successive hearings discover, slowly perhaps but surely, an extraordinary subtlety of intellectual comment on the librettos. It may be submitted that these are factors that make for immortality. First I discover in Elgar a very audacity of sincerity, without a moment's fear for the result; an

immovable determination to follow truth, as he sees it, wherever it may lead, and to whatever fate may impend. With Elgar there is no temporising. You may follow him to the heights, or you may choose to linger below; that is your own affair. Then, given the ardent artistic temperament, enthusiasm, invention and a purely musical nature hardly surpassed among the moderns, and in addition an easy command of every modern resource, whether of theory or practice, and we have indeed the equipment of an artistic conqueror.)

(Throughout "Gerontius" is seen the further advancement of the musical development of the last hundred years in the direction of expression. In this respect it has been claimed that Elgar is the greatest musician since Beethoven, possibly the greatest since Bach. Without instituting the smallest comparison where comparison would be profitless, it may be suggested that Elgar would never, could never, set sacred words in the modern binary form, after the manner of Haydn in "Insanæ et vanæ curiæ" or Mozart in "Splendente te Deus." With all his modernity Elgar's method

*The Advancement of Musical Development,
as seen in Elgar's "Gerontius".*

is rather a reversion to Bach, whose Saint Matthew Passion has been the model of expressiveness through the whole of the modern period. Elgar in "Gerontius" exhibits greater power in the expressive and emotional domain than any other modern writer, not excepting Brahms in his Requiem. Moreover, his strength is not always shown in miracles of polyphony. It has been said of Mozart that he obtained great effects by simple means. And despite the common reproach that Elgar relies on elaboration and extraordinary combinations, it can be shown that his greatest work is often easiest to grasp. Even the unæsthetic are strangely moved by the Litany which follows the chorus "Rescue him" in "Gerontius." What is the magic of that simple strain? There can be but one answer. The succession of chords, seen in print, looks simple enough. But when heard, imagination is carried back to the middle ages, to "cathedrals dim and vast, where the majestic organ rolled Contrition from its mouths of gold." No work of Elgar is wanting in similar instances of singular power with simple means. In "King Olaf" the chorus, "Like torrents in

summer," exemplifies this faculty, the very hall-mark of golden genius. Passing to later work, who can fail to be struck with the wondrous force of such passages as the setting in "The Apostles" of the words, "To give unto them that mourn a garland for ashes" with their continuation? Again may be cited the words of Jesus at the wayside, a recitative following an introduction that seems an echo of the flight of Gerontius to heaven, "Blessed are the poor in spirit." Another example worthy of study is the chorus, "Draw out thy soul to the hungry," though study will hardly reveal its secret. There is, too, something of the arch-mage in a later chorus. "Blessed are they which have been sorrowful," which, like all the passages quoted, has the remarkable quality of producing the deepest emotional stirrings in those who hear it most often—a suggestive fact. The story of the overwhelming effect of Beethoven's Fifth symphony on Lesueur, the master of Berlioz, is not without its counterpart relating to the music of Elgar. A chorus-master of first rank and of such vast experience and constant practice that one might be pardoned the

assumption that his musical emotions were calloused by long usage, assures me that the short passage, "Proclaim unto them that dwell on the earth," which occupies about a page and a half of "The Apostles," produces on him an effect which can only be described as almost paralysing: Minds in affinity with the mystic mood are similarly affected by certain passages in "Gerontius," and it has been observed that few are agreed as to the point at which the highest plane is reached, and further that each successive hearing is apt to induce change of opinion, facts not without a subtle suggestiveness of their own.

(In "Gerontius" Elgar has displayed daring subjectiveness, vivid imagination and perfect equipment. Yet without beauty all these were as nothing. And there is beauty in profusion. To follow the sounds with the words is to experience the highest enjoyment. As absolute music the introduction and the choruses are beautiful exceedingly. Elgar's mastery of polyphony is never pedantic; there is always a reason, a special meaning. "When I write fewer than the usual four vocal parts," says Elgar, "it is because I do not want four.

Elgar's Daring Subjectiveness in His Gerontius

When I write fourteen, it is because I want them all." "Gerontius" has examples of fourteen parts, yet everywhere the psychic impression is so strong that the most scholastic hearer is apt to be unconscious of the technique because his faculties are absorbed in the sublime.)

Elgar's Projector

VII

“THE APOSTLES”

As we have seen, the germ of “The Apostles” oratorio dates from Elgar’s school-days, some twenty years before his first acquaintance with Newman’s poem of “Gerontius.” Wherefore the idea of his having, on the spur of the moment, written it for the Birmingham Festival of 1903, must be dismissed as fallacious. A few days before its production he said :
“There is a popular error concerning musical commissions for festivals. Some people seem to think that a composer sits waiting, like the false witnesses of Westminster Hall, men who, in the olden time, stood about with straws in their shoes, ready to swear anything to order. It is a mistake to suppose that a musician stands waiting to be hired, like a man in a fair. A composer worthy the name never waits for an order before setting to work. He

is always thinking out works, always making sketches. He may complete a work for a festival. Another favourite delusion is this : that a composer cannot do his best, his most inspired work, under such a commission to complete. The contrary is the case. When he knows that his music will be produced in the most perfect manner, with the best principals, the best band, the best chorus possible, and with every accessory he may demand, the natural result is that he rises to the occasion. He is encouraged, inspired, and generally stimulated. 'The Apostles' oratorio was projected before 'Gerontius.' I have been thinking it out since boyhood, and have been selecting the words for years, many years. I am my own librettist. Some day I will give you my ideas on the relationship between librettist and composer."

(That Elgar is a daring librettist must be conceded. The character of Judas is set forth on the plane of the higher criticism. Elgar takes the old view now accounted modern, that Judas had no intention of delivering Christ to death, but rather that he desired to afford opportunities for the display of a God-

like power which must have compelled the Jews to acclaim Him as their King. The sin of Judas was an attempt to know better than the Master ; whence came awful consequences. Again, a certain utterance concerning Mary Magdalene is given to a chorus of women. “A man said it,” the composer remarked, “a man said it in those ancient days. But it is women who say such things to-day.”)

Elgar's Method of Writing
 (“What is my method of writing? When I propose such a work as this I first of all read everything I can lay my hands on which bears on the subject directly or indirectly, meditating on all that I have sifted out as likely to serve my purpose, and blending it with my musical conceptions. Every personality appears to me in a musical dress. I suppose that all who read novels form mental pictures of the characters. So with me : I involuntarily give to each a musical character, clothe each with a musical expression, in this case Judas, Peter, and the rest. I do not seek for character-motives : they come, in all places, at all seasons. I never sit down and say, ‘Now I will compose.’ The thing is inconceivable to

me. What comes, comes of itself ; of course I am often thinking in music."

If the first performance of "Gerontius" gave rise to doubt, the production of "The Apostles" gave rise to tenfold more doubt. The difficulty with Elgar is that he will not rest and be thankful. The critics find it hard to keep pace with him. Swinging up the slopes of Parnassus with ever-increasing length of stride, he leaves them panting, breathless, declaring that the ascent is too steep, or, if less candid, that the last peak was the highest, and that further climbing is but climbing down. And once again the general attitude may be recognised as inevitable. Mr. A. J. Balfour has told us that though "the public often want some new thing, they do not often want a new kind of thing. And accordingly it commonly, though not invariably, happens, that when the new thing appears, it is welcomed at first by the few, and only gradually, by the force of fashion and otherwise, conquers the genuine admiration of the many. The true artist is moved in no small measure by the desire that his work shall be his own ; no pale reflection of another's methods, but an expression of himself in his

*The Doubt Caused by Elgar's
"Gerontius" and "The Apostles."*

own language." This passage, written long before our composer was famous, might have related directly to Elgar and "The Apostles."

(The later work was harder to write than "Gerontius," and is harder to understand. In the earlier composition Elgar had the advantage of a unified libretto with a single central idea, clearly and strongly stated and universally interesting. Moreover, the subject was one of mystic idealism, in dealing with which the composer was accorded utmost licence. Since all was beyond our ken, he might imagine as he would. True, there was doubt; but time and the German pæans worked wonders, and "Gerontius" was accepted as a masterpiece.) Then we tacitly told Elgar to pause awhile; to let well alone; to be content with the eminence already reached, and not to strain onward and upward in obedience to an imaginary "Excelsior"; imaginary, because inaudible to us. True to his star, Elgar kept on the rising track after the manner of his like in every age. The true genius is a Finder, a Leader. He lives in the age to come, is often so far in advance as to be almost out of sight, a mere dot on the horizon. The critic is

(The Apostles)

Elgar's
Continued
Upward
Race

dominated by the memory of past ideals. He has no *locus standi* to deliver judgment on the real pioneers of art. We have only to remember what was said of Mozart, of Beethoven, of Schumann, of Wagner. With the past before us we may note some carpings at Elgar and "The Apostles." It is said that he is too chromatic; the same was said of Mozart; that he is weak in counterpoint; Handel is charged with saying this of Gluck; John Hullah certainly said it of Beethoven. More especially is it alleged that the work lacks coherence and consistency of style. The origin of this last charge will be seen from a brief description of the libretto plan.)

Elgar has chosen the words from the widest range of Scripture, apocryphal and other. The work is divided into two parts, which are again subdivided into seven, which form a natural sequence thus : 1. The Calling of the Apostles ; 2. By the Wayside ; 3. By the Lake of Galilee ; 4. The Betrayal ; 5. Golgotha ; 6. At the Sepulchre ; 7. The Ascension. The seven divisions are again divided into scenes from which arises a certain complexity demanding patient study and a certain pious

enthusiasm, following on a certain degree of artistic faith. The oratorio requires time to grow upon the listener, who needs the successive hearings that at once familiarise and illumine. There is at first but a dim view of the matter; we lose our bearings; fail to follow the abounding subtleties of allusion. The thing is deep, and the age is not given to profundity. We see in part; as through a glass, darkly. We recognise beauty and colossal command of resource, for a parallel to which we must revert to Bach and Wagner. What we at first fail to realise is the essential coherency. But if the thing as a whole comes slowly, it comes. After many days the mental Shofar sounds, and "it shines." Then only is the rich treasure appreciated, the poetry and greatness of conception and execution estimated at their real worth.

(For one, I have no doubt that in the end Elgar's first instalment of his projected trilogy of "The Apostles" will be esteemed an advance on "Gerontius," not only in point of technique but also in loftiness of conception, in general nobility of thought, and even in originality of invention. If "Gerontius" had

*The Possibilities of Elgar's
Composition, "The Apostles" and
"Gerontius" as Compared to Each Other*

the defects of its qualities, these would be an emotionalism tending to effeminacy and a want of reticence where reticence would be the higher art. It is admissible to suggest that the score of "Gerontius" is over-elaborated, and to refer the composer to the example of Beethoven, who laboured to clear his symphonies of the redundant. The charge of over-elaboration may be made against "The Apostles," the other charges must fail. The later work is of more masculine fibre, and, with all its passion, has greater reserve. And greater reserve means greater dignity. There is the same religious fervour, something of the same awe and mystery, with higher nobility and deeper strength. There is also the same Elgar mood, one of the chief characteristics of which is the ineffable tenderness which to some minds savours of feminism, to others merely of the impassioned character of the Romanist ritual (as contrasted with the Puritan), under whose influence the composer spent his most impressionable years. The Elgar atmosphere is unique. Here he borrows from none. No doubt Elgar is deeply indebted to his predecessors. "The greatest genius is the most

indebted man." In one or other of his works, we are reminded of Wagner, of Berlioz, of Tchaikovsky, just as in the works of these composers we are reminded of others. But the mood is different: the hypnotic effect is different: the Elgar impression is of Elgar alone. To listen to "Gerontius" or "The Apostles" is to be left in an emotional state wholly unlike that induced by any other composer. If there is a trace of Wagner, it is a Wagner of more tenderness; if of Berlioz, a Berlioz of greater depth and reality; if of Tchaikovsky, a Tchaikovsky of sweet reasonableness and celestial hope. From end to end "The Apostles" is permeated with the most subtle essence of the composer's thought and feeling. It is this quintessence of sincerity that gives power. Herein is the secret, the grand arcanum. It is the very unveiling of the soul. It was said of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony that therein was the tone-poet's spirit expressed in harmonies. Something of the kind might be written on the scores of "The Apostles" and "Gerontius.")

(It is admitted that to hear "The Apostles" once, and once only, is to be dissatisfied. The

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*Criticisms of Elgar's
"Gerontius," "The Apostles"*

first impression is that of a beautiful panorama of which the various scenes are not satisfactorily connected. There seems a want of cohesiveness, and, looking to the libretto, gathered from a wide area, you are inclined to suggest that the work lacks the concentration and unity for which the composer was indebted to the poem of "Gerontius." The beauty of the music is undeniable. The power of representing varied emotions is equally beyond argument. Originality of theme-conception and amazing technique of warp and woof command the admiration of the musician. The note of cloistral meditation, peculiar to Elgar, pervades the whole with an unearthly beauty. And yet even the faithful hover between doubt and admiration. They speak of sketchiness, of non-homogeneity, of rich promise and but partial performance; of noble texts without adequate sermons. The more self-confident talk of Elgar's limitations, forgetting that the critic may have limitations too.

The trouble lies not in any defect of the composer, but in the stupendous complexity of the music, which only reveals itself after much artistic fasting and prayer. After one hearing

we stand, as it were, too near. To hear the oratorio gradually at rehearsals, with time to study the connections, the relationships, the points of contact between the various scenes, is to experience a real revelation. Even then a first performance usually falls short of expectation; for while it is possible to recognise splendid choruses, powerful characterisation, and a host of beauties of almost every conceivable kind, the sum of the whole leaves a certain hesitancy of decision. Further study of the score, more rehearsals and a second performance clear this away. It is as though one had stood too close to a great cathedral window with seven lights, each with several pictured divisions, every one with manifest beauty of its own, but only part of the whole. And then it is as though one had receded, keeping the whole in gaze and noting that with larger view came gradual fusion into glorious unity.

With reference to this crucial question of unity it may be submitted that Elgar has achieved the unity proposed. His libretto is built on the lines of Greek tragedy. The Greek tragedians did not trouble with explanatory

detail. The people knew the stories, and the poet's aim was but the heightening of leading incidents by action and environment. So with Elgar in "The Apostles." He assumes that people know the story with which he deals, and, setting forth its main features, he leaves something to the educated imagination. In assuming that musical critics are acquainted with the New Testament, Elgar may have erred, but it is only fair to state the principle on which he has worked. Further, his thought on unity, using the term in its all-embracing sense, may well be given in this connection. Elgar holds strongly to the art-necessity of consistency. He once said, "I am a follower of Sir Charles Eastlake, who in one of his art-lectures says that 'consistency of convention' is essential in pictorial art. So in music. My interest in this is so great that I could talk on the theme for hours." To illustrate a part of his meaning he took the score of "Don Giovanni" to the piano and played portions of several numbers. "No matter what the mood," he continued, "in the lighter scenes or the most tragic, all is on the same level. There is the same creative force, the same degree of inspiration. Every

extended work must be coherent and consistent from beginning to end. If you adopt this formula of the deeper consistency, you will discover why certain things jar on you, if in an artistic frame of mind. Apply it to oratorio. You may perhaps remember instances in which the magnetic feeling is cut off in order to give the chorus a chance, when at the moment a chorus is not a consistent development."

As to complaints of want of beauty—and such complaints have been heard—it avails little to speak. *De gustibus non disputandum est.* Difference in taste implies difference in the very fibre of our being. Those who differ widely stand on different planes of development. Between them is a space which only time and culture can bridge. What of the different standards of beauty that have from time to time been set up by mankind? What of the different standards upheld by different races? Why do some prefer the tom-tom to the Ninth Symphony? When we remember the music that seemed beautiful to us long years ago, and contrast it with what now seems beautiful, we are tempted to declare that the sense of beauty is mirage, illusion. It has

been said that beauty in music is in the heart and brain of the hearer. Which is a summing up of the common consciousness so often in line with the profoundest philosophy. So much for the plaint of such as find no beauty or not enough in "The Apostles," which has also been called dull and monotonous. To which it may be replied that if we make entertainment our standard, we must condemn Dante and Michael Angelo and Titian's "Last Supper," and Rubens' "Descent from the Cross," with a host of art-works of the more serious kind. Those who seek entertainment in oratorio are certainly in the majority; applause proved that long ago. The weakest numbers are always most popular, as being nearest the intellect of the average hearer. To this majority the pervasive tenderness and solemn mystic beauty of "The Apostles" can never strongly appeal.

The technical difficulty of Elgar's choral works has been insisted upon by the echoes whose critical stock-in-trade consists of safe catchwords. Elgar is not often technically difficult for voices. That there are dangerous passages is true enough, but they are not

*The Technical Difficulty
of Elgar's Choral
Works*

dangerous by reason of the composer's want of contrapuntal considerateness. Rather is it by reason of momentary want of support to the voices, or to a succession of harmonies which incur risk of false intonation. Practised chorus-masters find him far less difficult than Brahms.) (It was at first the fashion to speak of Elgar as essentially an orchestral writer, as a one-sided man who knew nothing of voices. On the contrary, Elgar as a vocal writer is at least on a level with the best composers living, if not altogether supreme, which last bold proposition has been urged by some. Not that he constructs greater vocal effects than one or two others, but that while his great climaxes rank with the finest in existence, he has originated vocal combinations of great power and beauty in short phrases, examples of which have already been cited.) (As an orchestral expert, Elgar has no rival except Strauss, and in knowledge of the poetry of the individual instruments Elgar is probably first. Replying to a query as to his creation of new orchestral combinations, he once said, "They say so, but I never in my life said to myself, 'This shall be new; I will do something novel.'")

*Elgar as
a Vocal
Writer*

*Elgar as
an
Orchestral
Expert*

(The fact is I mentally hear the instruments, and when scoring put down what I feel that the sentiment of the words, if there be words, demands for the most perfect expression attainable. So far as I am concerned the thing is already complete in my mind: to make others feel it as I do is the trouble. If I could only write as fast as I think!")

(The Elgar Festival, unique honour to a unique personality, displayed the amazing variety and extraordinary scope of Elgar's genius. No test could be more severe. Apply it to the great names in music, and we find that only the greatest could emerge with equal honour, with equal triumph. From which it may be argued that we may anticipate the verdict of posterity as to the final position of Edward Elgar's niche in the Temple of Fame. What Wagner did for opera, from the point at which it was left by Mozart and Weber, Elgar is doing for oratorio from the point at which it was left by Handel and Mendelssohn, and, as many believe, with equal inspiration. This is but a part of his work, but were this his solitary achievement he would have richly earned a conspicuous place among the immortals.)

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46. MS.
47. MS.

48. MS.

49. The Apostles : oratorio.

50. In the South : concert overture.

Of the unpublished works with opus number the early ones are: Quintet for Wind, String Quartet, and Sonata for pianoforte and violin.

The later ones are: Falstaff, concert overture; a String Quartet; and the unnamed pendant to Cockaigne, showing the reverse of the joyous picture therein drawn.

Several short works have been published without opus number, and a large number exist in manuscript in addition to the list given above, which has the approval of Dr. Elgar.

Sonata etc

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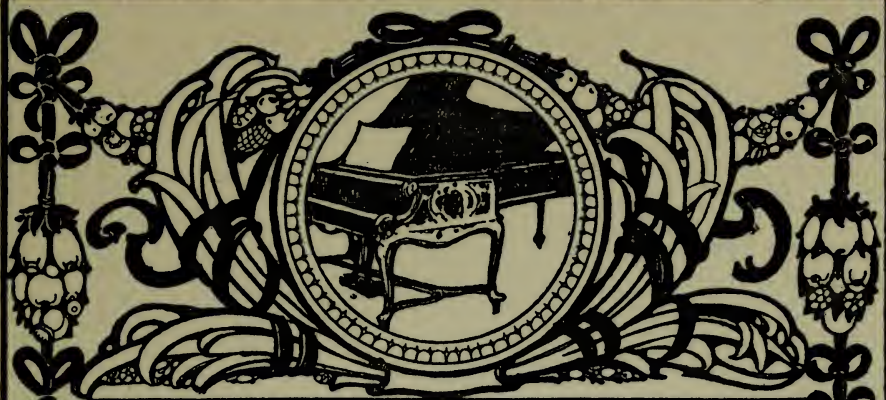
PUBLISHER'S NOTE.

NO musician of modern times has approached more closely to the heart of the public, nor stirred more profound emotions, than Peter Ilich Tchaikovsky, composer of the "Pathetic" Symphony. The authentic biography of this genius, who gave musical expression to many phases of contemporary thought and sentiment, has been anxiously awaited both in England and America. The forthcoming volume will necessarily appear in an abridged form, since it has been judged that many of the details and a certain proportion of the letters contained in the original edition could only be of vital interest to those intimately acquainted with Russian life and society.

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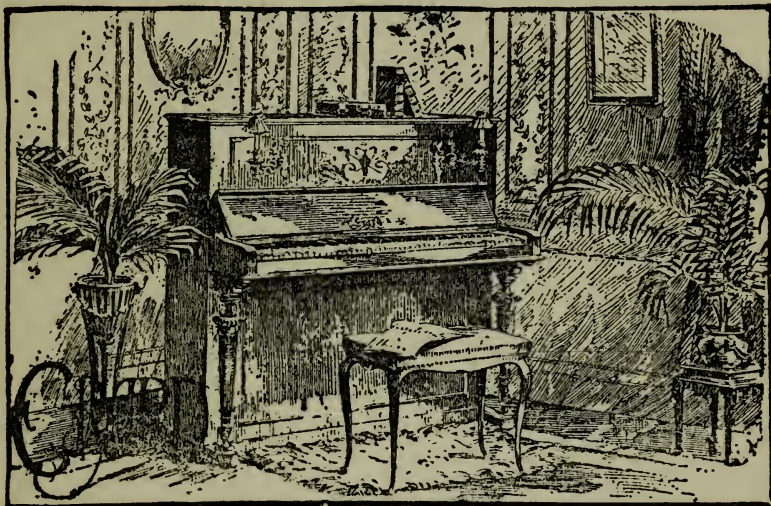
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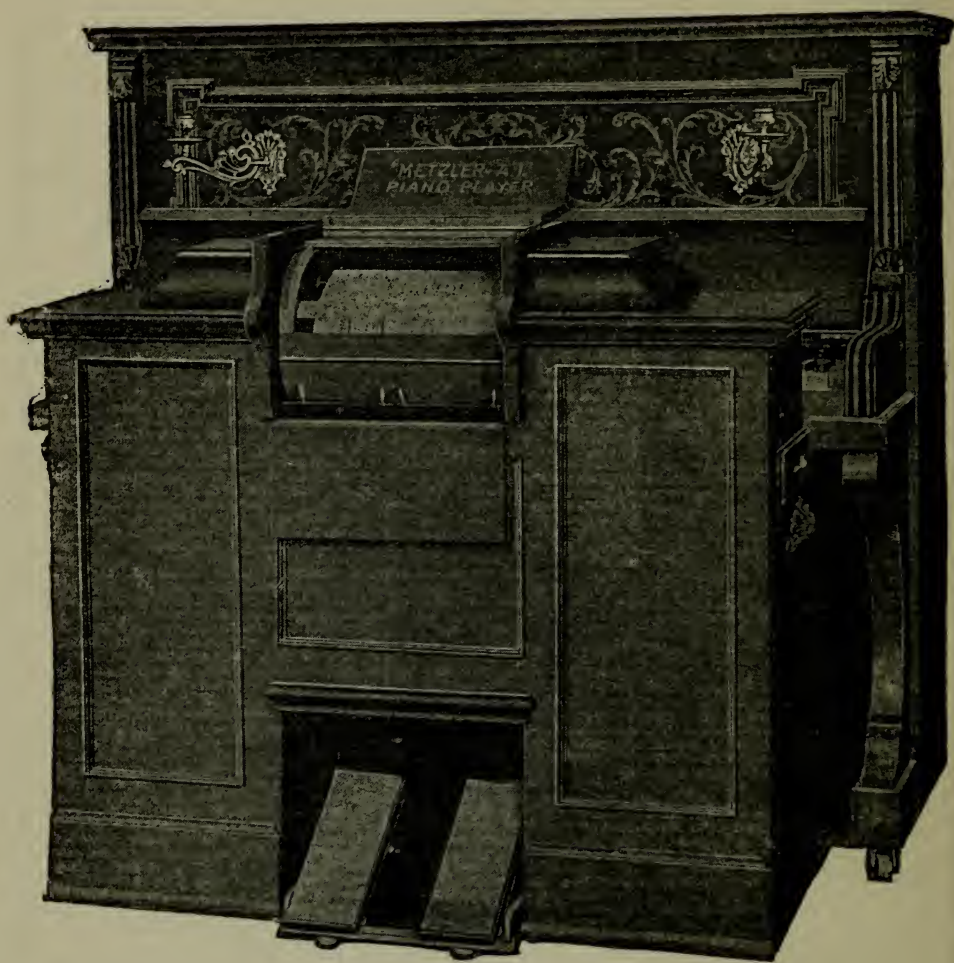
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EDITOR'S NOTE.

IT seems evident that the years are bringing back to the Anglo-Saxon races that wider and more social interest in music which, half a century ago, seems to have dwindled to a languid, dilettante patronage of Italian Opera. Every year a larger number of the public become habitual concert-goers, and music seems to be entering upon a healthier and more democratic phase of its existence. With this revived interest comes a desire to know something more of the master-spirits of the musical world; not merely of the old classical composers, but of those living personalities who are actually shaping the destinies of the art.

EDITOR'S NOTE (*Continued*).

Biographies of Bach, Handel, and Mendelssohn, for all their instructive value, tell us nothing of the present day. The men who are making history in politics, warfare, or science have a strong grip on our interests and imaginations. Judging from the success of many recent memoirs, and the increasing number of series devoted to books on living celebrities, it seems as though contemporary biography, with its glow and actuality, exercised an endless fascination for the public. As far as I am aware, no English or American series has attempted to do for musicians what has been done for living men of letters, soldiers, statesmen, or scientists. It is to be hoped that the "Living Masters of Music" series will supply this deficiency by giving the public just those details about the composers and executive artists whom they hear and see, as will enable them to realise their individual influence on contemporary music.

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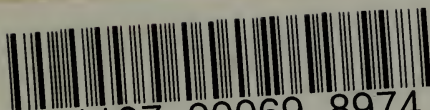
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